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SUBJECT: CHIRAC MEETING WITH QATARI AMIR FOCUSES ON IRAN,
SYRIA/LEBANON, PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS

REF: PARIS 535

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt,
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Elysee contacts reported that President Chirac's January 27 discussion with the visiting Qatari Amir focused largely on Iran, with the Qatari leader stressing concern over Iran's nuclear program and its negative regional role. On Syria/Lebanon, Elysee contacts stressed that Chirac sought to dissuade the Qatari Amir from believing the illusion Syria could somehow be "separated" from Iran. The French president also reiterated GoF opposition to the Saudi initiative aimed at increasing coordination between Damascus and Beirut. On Palestinian elections, the Qatari Emir viewed Hamas' election victory as indicative of the growing Islamist trend in the region, while Chirac reiterated that the new Palestinian government should "choose peace," by renouncing violence, recognizing Israel, and expressing support for previous international accords. While Elysee contacts anticipated that January 30 Quartet and EU GAERC meetings would produce a unified line on what steps Hamas must take, they concluded that it would take time to assess potential impact on EU assistance to Palestinians, and cautioned that the EU could not abandon the Palestinian people. End summary.

IRAN

¶2. (C) In a brief readout provided to poloff January 30, Presidential Advisor for the Middle East/Americas Dominique Boche stressed that President Chirac's January 27 meeting with Qatari Amir Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani focused largely on Iran. Boche described the Qatari leader as very worried over Iran's nuclear program and Iran's negative role throughout the region -- in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria in particular. The Qatari leader expressed concern that recent speeches by Iranian President Ahmadinejad echoed Arab public sentiment and had the potential to appeal to "Sunni radical fringe" in addition to Shi'a populations. Boche reported that discussion did not address how Qatar would respond if Iran were referred to the UNSC Council, but he conceded that the GoF was seeking to intensify contact with Qatar to help make it a constructive UNSC member. He concluded that the Qatars wanted the West to remain firm with Iran and find a peaceful solution to keep it from becoming a nuclear power, in a way that did not put GCC states at risk. A GoF communique issued after the meeting stressed President Chirac's view that Iran "must conform to its obligations" and that the February 2-3 IAEA BOG meeting would be an occasion to remind Iran of these obligations.

¶13. (C) Boche commented that the Qatari Amir viewed Syria and Lebanon within the context of his concerns about Iran and its growing influence in the region. According to Boche, the Amir was convinced of the "illusion" that Syria could somehow be separated by Iran, and, for this reason, supported Saudi initiatives to revive closer coordination between Damascus and Beirut. Boche stressed that the GoF conveyed to the Amir its "total opposition" to the Saudi initiative or any other proposals to relieve Syria of its UNSC obligations or revive its domination of Lebanon. Chirac similarly advised the Amir that it was unrealistic to expect that Syria could be "separated" from Iran, as Bashar al-Assad would never make such a choice. Chirac stressed that any further Arab initiatives on Syria/Lebanon should be on the basis of Syria's existing UN obligations under UNSCR 1559 and resolutions related to the Hariri assassination. The GoF did not object to Arab initiatives aimed at restoring normal diplomatic relations between the two countries or achieving demarcation of borders, but Syria's UN obligations must be the point of departure. Boche described the discussion on Syria/Lebanon as constructive, with the Amir being measured in his views. The GoF would continue to seek intensified discussion with Qatar on Syria/Lebanon, particularly among UN ambassadors in New York, to make Doha part of the "common international front" in support of Lebanese independence/sovereignty and insisting on full Syrian compliance with its UN obligations.

PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS/ASSISTANCE

¶14. (C) Boche described the Qatari Amir as worried by Hamas' surprise election victory, which the Amir viewed as part of a rising Islamist trend throughout the region. An Elysee communique issued after the Qatari meeting stressed President Chirac's call for "the next Palestinian government to choose peace, which comes by renouncing violence, recognizing Israel, and respecting international accords. It is also in this way that relations with the EU can be established."

¶15. (C) Boche described GoF public statements on the Palestinian elections (reftel) as seeking to convey firmness on conditions (renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel, respecting international accords including Oslo) which Hamas must meet in order for the new Palestinian government to have contact with France and the rest of the international community, an issue which the January 30 GAERC and Quartet meetings should harmonize further. He viewed GoF statements as consistent with those put forward by the U.S., which could help strengthen PA President Abbas' hand in negotiations with Hamas on formation of the new PA government. At the same time, Boche cautioned that it would take more time for the GoF and the rest of the EU to determine what impact a Hamas-led government would have on EU assistance to Palestinians in general (not just the Palestinian Authority). He concluded that even with an absence in contact between the EU and the new Palestinian government, the EU could not abandon the Palestinian people.

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Stapleton